



South Tyneside Council



South Tyneside Council

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) 2023-2024

Contents:

1. Background
2. Introduction
3. Purpose of the protocol
4. What is severe weather?
5. Provision
6. Activation of the protocol
7. Referral
8. Referral Update
9. Eligibility criteria
10. Accommodation
11. Review of provision
12. Financial implications
13. Monitoring and review
14. Contact information

1. Background

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) continues to seek to end rough sleeping and build upon the work done to reduce rough sleeping via the 'everyone in' campaign. Last year On 3rd September 2022, a new rough sleeping strategy, [ending rough sleeping for good](#), was published to drive forward the manifesto commitment. The last twelve months have been difficult as the country continues to be in a recession and the cost of living, including energy bills continues to rise, this has influenced the national figures for homelessness.

The latest national data published by DLUHC for the period January to March 2023 found that:

- 83,240 households were initially assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness and owed a statutory duty, up 5.7% from January to March 2022. 37,890 were assessed as being threatened with homelessness, and therefore owed a prevention duty which is down 0.7% on the same quarter last year and 41,950 were assessed and owed a relief duty, up 10.7% from the same quarter last year.
- Households with children increased by 12.1% but 6,440 households were threatened with homelessness due to service of a Section 21 notice to end an Assured Shorthold Tenancy- a decrease of 1.5% from same quarter last year.
- 13,670 households were accepted as owed main homelessness duty, up 20.1% from January to March 2023.
- On 31st March 2023, 104,510 households were in temporary accommodations which was an increase of 10% from March 31st, 2022. Households with children increased by 10.3% to 64,950 and single households increased by 9.6% to 39,570. Compared to the previous quarter, the number of households in temporary accommodation increased by 4%.

The government have brought in a number of Acts of legislation in order to improve the quality of housing stock and empowerment to tenants with the [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act 2023](#) , introduced the [Supported Housing \(Regulatory Oversight\) Bill](#), while continuing to explore the potential to improve security of tenure (abolishment of Section 21) and quality of accommodation within the private rented sector via the [Renters \(Reform\) Bill](#). It is hoped that this will help with sustainment of tenancies and prevention of homelessness.

Local Authorities continue to work with partners and the government to do what they can to continue the work to end rough sleeping. South Tyneside has been allocated funding via many sources including the Homelessness Prevention Grant 2023-2025, Ukraine Homelessness Prevention Grant Top-up, and ongoing funding from the Rough Sleeper Initiative fund.

Overall, the government has committed to spending £2 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the three-year period from 2022- 2025. This is all supported with the guidance of the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) . South Tyneside Council continues to chair a Rough Sleeping Action Group and Operational and Strategic Homelessness Forums to continue to work in partnership with the voluntary sector, health services and other agencies to try to ensure everyone is picked up. It will take a whole system approach to tackling rough sleeping and see investment in

accommodation, drug, and alcohol treatment, improved mental health provision and help to work schemes.

There is an acknowledgement that there is far more demand than supply for safe, secure, and affordable accommodation and South Tyneside Council continues to build upon current local initiatives including the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme, to identify suitable accommodation for those seeking homelessness assistance.

Nationally, regionally and across the local area there continues to be a rise in homelessness and the figures for these areas are set out below:

South Tyneside Homeless Data (data source South Tyneside Homes):

Period	Initial homeless presentations	Advice and Guidance cases	Prevention cases	Relief Cases
2020/2021	2680	1623	355	449
2021/2022	2459	1330	375	372
2022/2023	3096	1933	364	422

North-East H-CLIC Data (data source DLUHC):

Period	Initial Homeless Assessment	Homeless Duty Owed	Prevention cases	Relief cases
2020/2021	15,370	14,790	7,180	7,600
2021/2022	16,630	16,150	9,070	7,080
2022/2023 (to be verified)	18,720	18330	10,130	8,210

England H CLIC Data (data source DLUHC):

Period	Initial Homeless Assessment	Homeless Duty Owed	Prevention cases	Relief cases
2020/2021	284,330	270,560	119,890	150,670
2021/2022	290,180	278,110	133,450	144,670
2022/2023 (to be verified)	309,630	296,180	139,990	156,190

2. Introduction

Currently there are no legal protections for people sleeping rough during severe weather and no statutory duty to provide shelter unless a person is considered homeless and in priority need of assistance, even when weather conditions can be considered life threatening.

There is a humanitarian obligation on all local authorities to do all that they can to prevent deaths on the streets caused by severe weather. This includes the cold, but also conditions such as high wind and heavy rain and periods of hot weather where temperatures exceed 25 degrees. The aim of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is to ensure that there is an appropriate response available for people sleeping rough through the winter and summer months, particularly during severe weather.

The annual South Tyneside rough sleeper survey that is undertaken between 1 October – 30 November of each year with a wide range of stakeholders and partners has historically indicated that there are very few people who experience rough sleeping in the borough, but this is an estimate only providing a snapshot of the situation on the identified typical night. Other sources in the main that of the South Tyneside Rough Sleeping Action Group has found that this figure is not reflective of the actual picture, which is increasing significantly, and South Tyneside Council continues to seek a more accurate picture of the rough sleepers in the borough and the barriers and challenges present preventing them from securing both short- and long-term accommodation. Commissioned outreach services continue to identify and work with rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping in the borough. The current rough sleeper data is shown below:

South Tyneside Rough Sleeper figures (data source South Tyneside RSAG):

	June 22	Jul 22	Aug 22	Sept 22	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	June 23
RS through month	14	17	21	24	25	26	21	10	10	14	10	30	18
RS end of month	7	9	6	9	10	7	3	2	5	2	3	10	4
Repeat RS	6	6	15	10	16	18	16	10	4	9	5	11	14
New RS	8	11	6	14	9	8	5	0	6	5	5	19	4

(RS= Rough Sleeper)

At any time, rough sleeping or suspected rough sleeping can be reported direct to Street Link by visiting www.thestreetlink.org.uk This information is then forwarded to the outreach and Housing Options Service to investigate and verify the referral. The public can also call 0800 141 2645 (freephone) Monday-Thursday 9am- 5pm and Friday 9am to 4.30pm or email housing.options@southtynesidehomes.org.uk direct to report a rough sleeper or suspected rough sleeping. The team can also be contacted out of hours by calling 0191 456 2093.

3. Purpose of the protocol

This protocol sets out the arrangements that South Tyneside Council will put in place to ensure that people are not at risk of dying on the streets in the borough during severe weather.

Under the protocol, the Council will take the necessary steps to avoid death on the streets through prompt action being taken to ensure that all rough sleepers can have the opportunity to access shelter during periods of severe weather.

4. What is severe weather?

As there is no strict definition of classifying 'severe weather'. Homeless Link provided a list of conditions which could trigger the activation of the protocol, this is not exhaustive but includes:

- Severe cold;
- Excessive and/or prolonged rain;
- Extreme wind and associated wind chill factor; and
- Snow, frost, ice and associated chill factor.
- Heatwaves

The full definitions of these are set out in **Appendix 1**.

In addition to the risks associated with severe weather, consideration should be given to the actions that people may take to shelter from it. Unsafe shelters such as large, lidded bins, and illegal entry to empty or derelict buildings may be used. Some people may increase their substance use to cope with the bad weather; this in turn can impact on their health, decision making ability, and behaviour towards and interaction with others.

5. Provision

For the period of the SWEP protocol, accommodation will be sourced **via office hours** via the Housing Options Team for anyone found to be rough sleeping or presenting as roofless and can be contacted on 0800 141 2645.

Outside of office hours the Out of Hours Team will be available to accommodate anyone found to be rough sleeping or presenting as roofless and can be reached on 0191 4562093.

The housing options team will inform the out of hours team of availability of hostels, hotels, or temporary accommodation availability, which can be utilised during this period.

6. Activation of the protocol

Due to accommodation pressures within the borough, this year South Tyneside Council will activate SWEP between the period of **1 November 2023 – 31 March 2024, where either the temperature or wind chill factor drops to life threatening levels or if the weather is deemed extreme and life threatening due to other factors (as set out in Appendix 1)**. SWEP could be activated outside of this time-period should the weather dictate this course of action. This will be monitored via weather forecast alerts provided by the UK Health Security Agency as well as other weather forecast monitors and agreed between the Housing Strategy and Housing Options team managers.

The Summer Swep protocol for 2024 will be activated over the warmer weather conditions where provision of water and sun cream will be provided at designated 'welcoming spaces', especially where temperatures are forecast to exceed 25 degrees for more than three consecutive days. Accommodation will not be provided during this period unless there are extreme exceptional circumstances.

6.1 Activation during office hours

After agreeing to activate the protocol, the Housing Options Team will notify partners of the activation, where possible the Housing Strategy Team will also notify the Rough Sleeper Action Group.

During the activation period, anyone requiring accommodation during office hours will approach the Housing Options Team via the contact methods mentioned above.

6.2 Activation outside of office hours

The Housing Options Team will notify the out of hours service that SWEP has been activated and that they can place anyone approaching the service out of hours into SWEP approved accommodation, they will then be responsible for informing the housing options team of the placement.

6.3 Activation period

The Housing Options Team will then notify partners when the SWEP protocol is deactivated between the period of 1st November 2023 and 31st March 2024.

6.4 General

Due to the current pressures on accommodation within the South Tyneside area, there may be occasions where we cannot accommodate people due to availability and some occasions where people may have to be placed in accommodation outside of the borough. Should people lose accommodation due to their behaviours then we also cannot guarantee that they will be placed in alternative accommodation, although this will be assessed on an individual basis.

To reduce the risk of losing the accommodation, care will be taken to ensure that those being placed are assessed to ensure that it is as appropriate to their needs, where possible. Individuals will also be encouraged to engage with support services who can support them during the period, they are housing in SWEP accommodation and assist with their move on options to longer term rehousing.

7. Referral

Referrals to the service will be authorised by the Housing Options Team or Out of Hour's Team.

Those in need of the provision may present at services that work with people who are at risk of or who are homeless. In these instances, the service provider must contact the Housing Options Team who will confirm if a place can be offered.

For anyone presenting outside of office hours the service will be contacted by the Council's Out of Hour's Officer to confirm if a place can be offered.

Verifying that an individual is rough sleeping, ensures that those most in need of the provision receive access but this verification should not delay or prevent them from accessing the provision.

Housing Options will update the rough sleeper Action Group with details of the individuals who are accommodated via the SWEP protocol so that they can be picked up and discussed via that group should they be at risk of further periods of rough sleeping.

8. Referral update

When placed out of hours, the service provision named contact will update the Housing Options Team the next working day (this will be around 9.30am) on the expected referrals, and who was and was not accommodated.

Anyone accommodated in the service should present to the Housing Options Team the next working day to enable an assessment of need to be carried out and, if appropriate:

- Accept a homeless application and carry out investigations to determine local authority duty towards the individual.
- Provide temporary accommodation whilst investigations are carried out on the homeless application and a decision reached.
- Refer to partners for supported housing.
- Reconnect to their home area if the individual wishes to return, and it is safe to do so.

Individuals should always be encouraged to accept the support that is available, but this will not be a condition of them being able to access the service.

If any referral does not present for the service, then the Housing Options Officer who confirmed the placement should make every effort to contact the individual to establish their current housing status and a triage created so the person can be contacted. If the individual cannot be contacted, then the Housing Options Team should make the Outreach Team aware of where the person claimed to be rough sleeping so that this can be investigated further.

9. Eligibility criteria

SWEP operates outside of the usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing. The Council will not apply Part VII Housing Act 1996 criteria (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) when deciding to assist a person sleeping rough during the SWEP activation period. This means that the individual concerned is not required in this case to demonstrate eligibility for assistance, including access to public funds, priority need, intentionality, or a local connection. The individual concerned must only:

- Be at risk if they continue to sleep rough during the period of severe weather.
- Have nowhere to sleep indoors during the period of severe weather (this does not include cars, sheds, garages etc.); and
- Agree to assistance offered by the Council and/or its partners.

Severe weather increases the risk of death or serious illness to people who sleep rough. Many entrenched rough sleepers may be resistant to services and may be less likely to engage. This should not prevent them from being able to access the SWEP provision.

10. Accommodation

- To accommodate people during the SWEP period South Tyneside will likely place people in the following types of accommodation:
 - B&B and Hotel Rooms via booking arrangement
 - Houses of Multiple Accommodation (HMO) these could have en suite or shared facilities and may or may not offer support for those with complex needs.
 - Supported Accommodation- with commissioned services where there is a vacancy.
 - Other schemes specialising in rough sleepers or homelessness where there is a vacancy.
 - The council's own temporary accommodation where this can be made available.
- Careful consideration should be taken to ensure that appropriate accommodation is sourced. Following the pandemic, it is preferred that accommodation is self-contained or single rooms with en suite facilities to reduce the risk of contamination. Where this is not possible South Tyneside will seek to accommodate rough sleepers in houses of multiple accommodation (HMO) with en suite or shared facilities, or in supported accommodation or schemes who can accommodate them which may mean sharing facilities.

11. Review of provision

Due to limited accommodation available there may be a need to move the individual to more than one accommodation during the SWEP period as hotels and B & Bs may not be able to accommodate the individual for the full period.

If the person is engaged with a Housing Options Officer, then work should actively take place by both parties to resolve the homelessness and find more permanent or longer-term accommodation so that they can 'move on',

If any incidents of anti-social behaviour or unacceptable behaviour occur during the time the service is provided, a review of the individual being accommodated will take place. This will include consideration to alternative methods to prevent rough sleeping during the severe weather whilst managing the risks, where possible

Due to the current abnormal weather conditions hitting the area currently, those being higher or lower than average temperatures, South Tyneside Council reserve the right to amend the dates of the SWEP period accordingly and will be responsible for notifying the housing options team, out of hours service and partners accordingly.

12. Financial implications

Most of the cost of supporting the SWEP provision will be met through grant funding received from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), where possible the council may seek to fund this via housing benefit, such as in temporary accommodation but any additional cost will be met through the budgets held by South Tyneside Homes/ South Tyneside Council.

13. Monitoring and review

The Housing Options Team will record the following information to monitor the extent of rough sleeping within South Tyneside:

- Number of occasions SWEP activated and time period of each activation.
- Number and composition of rough sleeper households. This will include name, age, gender, nationality, last settled address, how long been sleeping rough, previous contact with services, where they intend to move onto when they leave and any primary support needs;
- Number of nights each rough sleeper accommodated.
- Verified rough sleeper.
- Number of previous contacts the rough sleeper has had with services.
- Where move on was to; and
- Any cost for emergency accommodation per night for each household.

The Housing Strategy Team will work with relevant partners to review the SWEP on an annual basis to ensure that:

- The needs of the rough sleeper are met during periods of severe weather; and
- Government priorities are reflected.

14. Contact information

Housing Options Team: 0800 141 2645

Out of Hours Support: 0191 4562093

Housing Strategy Team: 0191 4277000

Appendix 1: Definitions of severe weather.

Cold: extreme cold can cause serious health problems and death for those who are exposed overnight or for long periods of time. Historically, SWEP provision was triggered when the forecast was zero degrees or below for three days. It is now best practice to take a common-sense approach, where any forecast approaching zero is considered; the impact of rain, snow and wind chill are taken into account; and the 'feels like' temperature is checked, along with conditions underfoot (e.g., ice). There are benefits to opening provision for temperatures that are above freezing as this can be just as harmful, and for maintaining this provision over longer periods. These benefits are discussed throughout the guidance.

Wind: high winds can lead to an increased risk of injury through falling walls, roofing, uprooted trees, debris from buildings or walls that people may be sheltering in or against. This should also be considered where people are sleeping in tents.

Rain: heavy or sudden prolonged rain can lead to flooding and landslides. People sleeping under bridges, on riverbanks or near the sea, streams or canals may be particularly at risk, but there may be less obvious flood risks, for example, drains or gullies. Standing water, puddles and flooding may continue to be a risk after rainfall has stopped. As well as increased risk of drowning, being stuck in the rain and being unable to change out of wet clothes/shoes afterwards can lead to a range of health problems, including trench-foot. There is also an increased risk of loss or damage to belongings such as identification documents.

Heatwaves: People experiencing homelessness are at a heightened risk of developing heat-related illnesses due their inability to keep cool (owing to a lack of shelter) and reduced access to showers and drinking water. In their 'Dying Homeless Project'12, The Museum of Homelessness found that there were actually higher numbers of deaths of individuals in the summer, despite the common belief that more people die in the winter months. Needs are likely to be more urgent during daylight hours, so a different approach to SWEP may be needed.